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Bit-Defender

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Lillian Shea - Bitdefender

Nearing home, Lily raced to the front door before the dark skies overhead drenched her with rain, although she was already getting wet from the little bit that was coming down now. It was Thursday afternoon and her mom and dad wouldn't be home from work for a couple of hours yet.

Lily finally got inside the house and closed the door behind her. She then hung up her coat by the door and threw her book bag down onto the floor. Feeling hungry and a little thirsty, she decided to make herself a peanut butter and jelly sandwich; and maybe an ice cold glass of chocolate milk too. When she finally got to her room, the storm clouds outside really seemed to darken the room. There was a bright flash of light and a loud clap of thunder that shook the room and rolled off into the distance for a few seconds longer as the rain started to pour down.

She sat there for a moment, happy that her day was over. Her hair was still wet and clung to her, so with an exasperated sigh, she reached over and pushed the power buttons on both her computer and it's monitor; then quickly got up to get a towel from the linen closet.

Walking back to her desk, humming a song while drying her hair, she noticed the computer wasn't working. Running through a quick mental check list her dad taught her, she first checked to make sure there was nothing in the DVD-ROM drive. With nothing there, she held down the button and restarted the computer once more. She sat back expectantly and sighed, but nothing seemed to be happening. From the corner of her eye, she just caught a glimpse of something dart across the screen. Unsure of herself, she took her glasses off and cleaned them with the hem of her blouse. Looking back now, she saw a brown... something run back across the screen in the other direction! Looking at the computer case, she saw a small "WireMonkey, Inc." decal with a picture of a monkey wearing coveralls and a tool belt. She realized, that was the monkey from the computer store she and her dad went to a couple of months ago... Lily looked back at the computer screen and saw the monkey cautiously peer from around the corner of the screen.

"Don't be scared!" Lily said sweetly. "You can come out, I won't hurt you." Hesitantly, the monkey walked to the middle of the screen and stood there with his eyes wide open, ready to bolt if he needed to. "Aww, look how cute you are!", Lily said excitedly. The monkey looked like a small cartoon; an "avatar" she reminded herself. That's what her dad called computer cartoon characters. "Can you help me?" she asked. "I think my computer is broken. It won't turn on?!"

On the screen, the monkey nodded his head vigorously, then pulled out two tools from his belt and dashed off screen. Leaning back in her chair, Lily shook her head wondering how she'd ever explain this to her dad. He'd never believe it! Outside, the the

thunder rumbled in the distance as the storm seemed to move further away. Suddenly, the computer hummed to life! She could tell because the lights, "LEDs" her dad called them, flashed rapidly and the whirling noise of it's internal fans came to life. Yet, nothing showed on screen... Pulling a strand of hair behind her ear, Lily leaned down to try and restart the computer again. However, this time... The moment she touched the power button there was a bright flash of bluish-white light.. and then total and utter darkness.

## Chapter Two

Feeling weightless, Lily had the strange sensation that she was falling, then... quite abruptly, she landed on her bottom with a "thud!" Standing up, she rubbed her bottom while trying to compose herself. Looking around, she saw nothing but complete and total inky darkness.

Frightened, she called out.. "Hello? Anybody there?" "Once second!" called a voice from somewhere in the distance. Lily heard a 'click' and a bright spot light illuminated her from above. "There, that's better", said a strange voice. Out of the darkness casually strolled the same she saw on her computer before!? Brown fur, blue jean coveralls and the tool belt too! Something else she noticed was odd too, but she couldn't quite put her finger on it. "That it!", she thought. She and the monkey were almost the same size... she of course being slightly larger. "Where am I?", she asked in worried tones. "You're on the planet motherboard, ASUS!", exclaimed this mysterious monkey. "Planet...motherboard...ASUS?", she stammered in reply. "No, no no," said the monkey shaking his head vigorously. "Our planet is a motherboard and her name is ASUS!"

"Oh?!" she replied, still not quite sure she understood the monkey correctly. "Okay.. and who are you?", she squeaked in fear. "My name is Brian, but everyone else calls me Mike, whichever suits your fancy.", he said.

"How did I get here?", she asked looking about. Nothing but blackness seemed to exist outside of this spotlight she was in. Frowning for a minute, Brian placed on hand under his chin, rubbing his furry beard as if in deep thought, "Okay, I give up? How'd you do it?", he asked shrugging his shoulders. "But that's what I just asked you!?", Lily said in frustration, stomping her foot. "Well, you'd know better than I.", Brian quipped in return. "Me!?", Lily squeaked again. "You're the one who said you could fix my computer! All I did was try the power button!", she said as tears started to well up in her eyes.

"Where do we go from here? I have to get back before my mom and dad get home from work.. and ... I.. Wait a minute! You said motherboard! Like.. inside my computer?!" she said feeling dizzy. "Yup, yup, yup!", replied Brian, smiling with that goofy monkey grin of his.

"That's impossible!"

"It can't be impossible, cause you're here.. duhhh!"

"Well, how do I get out?", she asked... fresh tears welling up once more.

Mad at herself and mad at Brian for bringing her here, frustrated about not knowing what to do , Lily pleaded with Brian, "Please! I have to get home before my parents find out that I'm gone."

"I don't know what to do...", Brian said sadly.. "All I do is fix things around here."

They both stood there facing each other in the light. Lily biting her lip trying not to cry, while all Brian could do is hang his head. His eyes focused on the floor, roaming about as if he were

searching for something. Just then, he jerked his head up and snapped his fingers. "Ah-Ha!", he said startling Lily. "Maybe my wife Lucy would know what to do, we could go ask her! She always knows what I'm supposed to do!", he said with a bit of optimism in his voice.

"Sure, anything has to be better than this", she said turning about. Reaching into one of his pockets in his coveralls, Brian pulled out something that looked like a piece of chalk and drew an outline of a door and a neat little knob. "Ready to go", he asked, while turning the knob. "After you!", he said gesturing to Lily with his paw. Looking through the doorway, Lily stood awestruck at what she saw. It was a whole other world!!! Taking a big gulp and steeling herself, she stepped through the doorway.

### Chapter Three

Walking through the door, Lily and Brian came upon a mint and dark green sidewalk which had a peculiar copper street that ran as far as she could see. Bright spherical things moved along this copper street (which Lily guessed were like cars back home, except these 'vehicles' left a trail of light as they passed-by). Orange street lights hung up above which lined the streets. She also saw different types of 'monkey people' going to and fro wearing all sorts of clothing, from uniforms to business suits... even joggins outfits!!!

"Where are we now?", she asked curiously. "Hardware Side," Brian said casually, "not too far from the North Bridge. I live just around the corner on Capacitor Way. Just follow me!"

As they walked down the sidewalk, Lily noticed that most of the monkey people were busily rushing about, but some did take notice of her and looked at her in amazement. They were talking in hushed tones that Lily could sometimes hear, "That's the Grand Operator", "Why is she here?", "Who is that mommy?", and "She's an outworlder." Lily

smiled nervously and said "hi", but the monkey people just looked away as if they didn't notice her.

"Why are they afraid of me?" she asked. "Some have never seen an outworlder before, especially the one who operates the computer...let alone in person. To them, you only existed in stories," Brian waved his pawed flippantly, "they probably think you're a hologram."

Continuing down the sidewalk, Lily saw different store fronts. They passed an I/O Outlet store and a Dry Cell Mart that had a green awning ruffling in the breeze. She saw a monkey dressed in what looked like a post office uniform going into a store named SMTP to deliver mail, but his vehicle had 'E-Mail' written on it's side. On the corner up ahead there was what looked like a bus stop. "You have buses here too?" she asked. "Oh sure," Brian said nonchalantly, "that is the Front Side Bus. It goes directly across the North Bridge to the Pentium Palace. Of course," he said rubbing his head, "If you wanted to, you catch any number of buses. Take the DMI bus for example, that goes across town to the South Bridge. Or you could take the PCI-e bus from the North Bridge if you were trying to get the Graphics Card Academy. That is, if you're into that artsy fartsy stuff. You see, if we have too many cars on the road, it would make it much too hot in town. Things start to break when they overheat around here, that's why the bus's are so important."

Upon reaching the intersection, Lily looked up and saw a traffic light and a sign indicating that they were at the corners of Circuit Street and Capacitor Way. By the time the crosswalk like on the other side light up 'Walk', there were all kinds of monkeys waiting to cross. Some kept their distance from Lily; others didn't seem to even notice her because they were in such a hurry to cross the street. For the most part, Lily thought they all looked like normal people busily going about their lives just like back at home. After crossing the street, Brian and Lily turned the corner and walked on a bit further.

There they came upon an extremely large cylindrical building which had a gate that had windows that rose up ten stories high! As they walked to the gate, Brian paused a moment to enter a security code on a hidden panel. Out of nowhere, Lily heard a police siren. Startled, she looked down the street and saw the flashing lights of red and blue whiz by in a blur.

"What was that", she asked alarmed watching them fade in the distance. "That's the Bit Police Department ... or BPD. Trouble must be brewing somewhere in the city. I'm sure Lucy will know all about it", replied Brian while straining his neck to see where the flashing lights went. After pushing more buttons on what seemed an absurdly long passcode there was a 'beep' which was followed by a click as the gate unlocked. Brian pushed it open and motioned for Lily to follow. Once inside, they walked to the elevator, got inside and rode it up to the eighth floor. Upon reaching the eighth floor, the elevator doors opened and they walked down a rather plain hallway. While walking down the hallway, Brian pulled out a set of keys and sorted through them until he found the right one, then he stopped in front of a door marked 'B4', put the key in the lock and unlocked the door.

## Chapter Four

After opening the door, Brian walked in, hung up his tool belt on a hook and yelled, "Lucy I'm home!", and with a quick jerk of his head, motioned to Lily to follow him inside. Lily nervously walked in and stood just inside the door. She smelled the sweet smell of bananas in the air. Looking around, Lily say that Brian's apartment was simple and that besides married, he also had three children by the pictures hanging on the walls. In the room to her right was what looked to be like a very comfortable plush couch, a coffee table, a rocking chair, a couple of kids chairs and toys, and an entertainment center. A hallway in the far corner led to what Lily guessed was the

bedrooms. To her left, Lily saw a kitchen with a female monkey rushing about cleaning up and saying, "I wish he would've called to let me know we were having a guest! I am so sorry about the way the place looks."

Suddenly, there was a squeal and Lily heard a small stampede coming towards her and Brian from the hallway. Coming around the corner, three little monkeys were heading for Brian with one crying out, "Da da!", and two others "Daddy!" Two of them latched onto each of his legs, while the third, with a pink ribbon in her hair, was scooped up by Brian into his arms. As he made his way to the kitchen walking awkwardly, he snuggled the child in his arms with his nose making her scream with delight.

Turning to his wife, Brian said, "Lucy, children, I would like to introduce you to Lily. She is lost and trying to find her way home." Then turning to Lily, "Lily, this is my beautiful wife, Lucy." Blushing, Lucy waved a paw at him and said, "hello!", then disappeared back into the kitchen which was followed by the clicking of glasses. "And this is Patrick" Brian said while lifting one leg, "and Franklyn", he said lifting the other. "And this here is my little princess, Lexi", he said giving another kiss to the baby in his arms while his whiskers tickled her making her giggle and swipe at her face. "Okay children, say hi and run along and play", he said while putting Lexi down. Patrick and Franklin timidly said "hi" and ran off. Lexi crawled toward Lily, stood up and squeaked "Lee-lee", then lost her balance and fell on her bottom. Startled, she stuck a finger in her mouth getting that goofy thinking look that Brian had earlier, then giggling to herself she crawled off after her brothers. Brian motioned for Lily to follow him to the other room, "Please make yourself at home", he said while he plopped down on a plush couch. Lily decided to sit in the rocking chair. Finishing up in the kitchen, Lucy brought out a tray with three glasses of a yellow liquid and something that looked like banana chips on it and placed



the tray on the coffee table. She gave Brian a small peck on his cheek and sat down next to him.

Taking a glass from the tray, Brian asked his wife, "Lucy, do you know if there is anything going on in town? We saw the Bit Police drive by in a hurry."

"Oh sure", Lucy said, taking a glass and handing it to Lily (who said "thank you"), "the IRQs are at it again. They're always getting in each other's way --sometimes violently." "What's an IRQ?", Lily asked.

Lucy took the remaining glass from the tray and took a sip. She thought for a moment then said, "They are King Ceepee U's Interrupt Request Officials or IRQs. They decide who get to talk to the king and in which order to make sure everything runs smoothly. Of course, sometimes they bully each other and try to get promoted in priority...that means who's more important." She took another sip of her drink and paused for a moment. "As a matter of fact, just recently the modem's IRQ official kept insisting he's more important than the keyboard's IRQ Official, and that one turned ugly. It's silly if you aske me." Lucy said shrugging her shoulders, "That's just politics I guess. Hear my dear, try a banana chip."

Taking a sip of of her glass, Lily was pleasantly surprised at the sweet banana flavor of the drink. She also nibbled at a banana chip. "You said something about a king...a king Ceepee U? Do you think he could help me get home?" Lily asked hopefully. "Well that depends my love, where do you call home?" ,Lucy asked. Uneasily, Brian looked at his wife and said, " Er...um...the outworld."

"The OUTWORLD!!!", screeched Lucy. "No one has ever been to the outworld! How did you get ... ? Oh, that explains why you looks so familiar," she said shaking a finger at Lily. "My husband usually works in the monitor. You know, one time, he secretly took me up the video cord to take a peek at the outworld and it was your darling face that was using the computer!" Lucy closed her eyes, "I remember

now.. it was so romantic. You were playing Donkey Kong on the Software Side --he's my uncle you know?"

At that very moment, something rubbed up against Lily's leg and "meowed". Startled, Lily looked down and saw what appeared to be a paper thin cat. It was an black and white tabby that swatted playfully at Lily's shoe laces. "Oh, sorry, that's our cat, Tonya", Lucy said reaching for the cat.

"King Ceepee U is a great and powerful man. If anyone could find a way for an outworlder to go home it would be him. But there may be a problem my dear. No one has seen his majesty ever since his father, King Pentium the Fourth passed away. In King Ceepee U's grief, he is rumored to be going a bit out of his mind. Some say he is doing the work of four kings himself.... and that he has four personalities too!", Lucy said shaking her head in disbelief. "Well, I think the responsibility of running the world of ASUS is finally getting to him. According to Shirley..."

"Oh, don't bring up that gossip monger!", interrupted Brian.

Lucy, glaring at Brian continued, "her son works at the BIOS (Bi-Ohs) you see. And he said that there are really four kings doing the work of eight! What is this world coming to?!"

"Excuse me," Lily said softly, "But what's the BIOS?"

"Oh dear, I guess you do have a lot to learn", Lucy replied. "The BIOS department is responsible for checking the hardware of our world every time the computer is turned on. They make sure the 'Powered-On-Self-Test' - or POST, is administered to check that the Memory Mansion and its many warehouses are in proper order. They also check on King Ceepee U's personal messengers to make sure they're taken care of and in good health. The BIOS department also acts as the king's special advisors and helped to set up our government. They made all of our laws which are strictly enforced by them too. In fact, the IRQs and the Bit Police both work for the BIOS department and in the BIOS' infinite wisdom, they run the public census to inform the king of all the resources available to him."

"Well how can I get to meet this King Ceepee U?, asked Lily.

"You could try by going to the Pentium Palace my dear, but the king is notoriously hard to reach. You may have better luck by going to Software Side and asking his brother, Kernel Klink for help. They work very close together you know. You see, one is the King of Hardware Side and the other is the King of Software Side."

Lexi crawled around the corner of the coffee table in the living room. Using it for balance, she stood up and said, "Kookie!, Kookie!", reaching for another banana chip with her little paw. Brian smiled and handed one to her.

From the kitchen, the sound of a phone ringing could be heard. "Excuse me," Lucy said while getting up. She placed her drink on the coffee table, picking up Lexie who was greedily eating her banana chip and make her way to the kitchen. "Hello..", Lucy said as her voice faded away.

"See, I told you she'd know what to do", Brian said as he leaning back and kicking his feet up on the coffee table. "Ahh, that's my wife. You know, she used to work for King DOS, but took time off after having Patrick. Unfortunately, during her time off, the DOS dynasty ended, so Lucy decided to stay at home and work full time as a mother. And that she does very well!"

Lucy walked back to the living room holding on her hip. She handed the phone to Brian and said, "It's for you", swatting him playfully on the back of his head. "I heard that", she whispered. Smiling, he took the phone from her. "Hello?" Brian spoke into the phone. "Yes..uhuh...you sure? Okay, I'm on my way!" he said and hung up the phone.

Getting up from the couch, he handed the phone back to Lucy and said, "There is a serious problem at the Pentium Palace. The fan has stopped spinning and they think there's a problem with the heat sink. The boss wants the whole crew down there now. Apparently, word of the incident has already reached his majesty's ears and my boss is in some pretty hot banana chips. I've got to run, love." Reaching for

his tool belt by the door, he said to Lily, "You can stay here if you like?" "This might be my only chance to talk to the king. Can I please go with you?", Lily pleaded.

Brian nodded and hurried back to the coffee table where he grabbed the rest of the banana chips and shoved them into one of his front pockets. After kissing his wife and daughter goodbye, and Lily thanking Lucy for her hospitality, they left the apartment in a rush headed toward the Front Side bus stop.

## Chapter 5

Passing under the orange streetlights, they made their way back around the corner and ran down the street. As soon as they reached the bus stop, a huge bright white 'bus' appeared as if out of thin air. The door opened for them in a flash and they stepped onboard.

"Morning Jim", Brian said to the driver, handing him two banana chips, "we need to get to the Pentium Palace, pronto!"

"Morning, Bri. Who's your friend, I've never seen her before?", Jim replied and then stuffed one of the chips into his mouth. And just as quickly as the doors opened, they closed behind Lily and Brian.

"I'll tell you later, but we need to get going.. now!", Brian said as he grabbed Lily's hand and tried to find a place for them to sit.

After they were seated, Jim mumbled around the second banana chip, "Here we go!". Lily had just enough time to briefly look around and see the pristine white interior of the bus. There were large white fuzzy benches and advertisements for the I/O Outlet, Bananarama Bar & Grill, and a Bitway Foodmart too!

The bus ride was smooth. In fact, if it wasn't for Jim yelling, "We're here!", Lily wouldn't have known the bus had even stopped... let alone moved. Lily and Brian stepped off the bus and Lily could see the huge Pentium Palace. "On top of the Palace," Brian explained to Lily, pointing up, "where long metal fins poke deep into the sky... that's the heat sink." Looking up, Lily could

see the large black sky which had lightning flashing all around. There were dozens upon dozens of monkeys running wildly here and there. The place looked quite literally like a zoo. "Strange," she thought, "why is there no thunder?"

In the background she heard a loud-speaker announce in a mechanical female voice, "*101 degrees Fahrenheit - core burn out in 19 minutes.*" At that moment Lily could literally see the color drain from Brian's face. Grabbing Lily's hand, he hurriedly made his way through the crowd to where the closest WireMonkey, Inc. work trucks were parked. Once there, he spoke quickly to his co-workers, who seemed to be equipped with what looked like over-sized cotton swabs. After grabbing one himself, they all ran towards the Palace. The temperature was noticeably much higher here than anywhere else in the city. All the WireMonkey employees were sweating heavily as they made their way up a long flight of steps that led to the Palace. As an afterthought, Lily noticed that they were all wearing harnesses and a few of them had coiled rope slung over their shoulders as well. Threading their way through the crowd to the Palace doors, Brian and Lily were ushered into a lobby where large, burly monkeys dressed in black suits were checking ID cards. They seemed to talk to one another when they touched their ear pieces. When Lily came upon one of them, he grunted, "I.D.?" Lily reached into her pockets searching frantically for something and finally found her school identification card. She pulled it out and handed it to the guard who grunted loudly again and held the card up to compare the picture to her. "What's an 'Element-tary School.?'?" he asked, handing back the card. You mean you don't know? It's a place to learn silly!" Lily replied, hoping her playful tone would lighten up the mood. "You mean like an academy?" The burly monkey grumbled, as if he disliked education. "Yes, like an academy, Lily said excitedly.

*"112 degrees Fahrenheit - core burn out in 15 minutes", the female voice called out.*

"We don't allow children at the Palace, King Ceepee U's decree", said the guard defiantly, looking around.

Meanwhile, on top of the Palace, huge ventilation shafts, too many to count, shot into the air, one after another. Pressurized air screamed high up into the sky from each and every shaft. One vent broke loose and fell to the ground, landing with a loud metallic 'crunch' near to where the guard and Lily were talking. The guard flinched and covered his head. "Lily! Come on, we gotta go!" Brian yelled out from the other side.

While the guard was still distracted, Lily ducked around him and took off running toward Brian. The guard turned around yelling, "Hey! Stop!" Ignoring the guard, Lily heard the WireMonkey crew getting louder as she ran forward and was soon with Brian. They made their way with the WireMonkey crew to the elevators. Waiting impatiently, the crew shuffled their feet from side-to-side, but as soon as the elevator doors opened, they crammed in shoulder-to-shoulder and on top of each other. There was barely any room for Lily to fit. How the elevator doors closed is anyone's guess.

## Chapter 6

When the elevator reached the roof, the doors opened and everyone spilled out. The WireMonkey crew immediately got to work. They rapidly hooked up their harnesses and ropes with the practical skill of veterans. Lily watched in amazement as the crew scrambled up into the massive metal fins with ease. Working their way to the top of the heat sink, they moved methodically, swinging from fin to fin, swabbing fluffy gray filth. As one point, Lily saw one monkey get burned badly. The other monkeys closest to him rushed to his aid.

A huge hand came down on Lily's shoulder, scaring her, "I thought I told you young lady you're not allowed to be here", the

burly guards voice growled. Turning, Lily say it was the guard from downstairs. "But, but, but..", she stammered as the guard started dragging her away.

*"151 degrees Fahrenheit - core burn out in 5 minutes", rang out the female voice.*

As the guard, with Lily in tow, approached the elevators, Lily stole one last look up at the crew. The lightning still flashed angrily in the sky while the monkeys worked frantically with their swabs. The guard was mashing the call button for the elevator impatiently. "Hurry up!" He said with the same grumbling in his voice he had when talking to Lily.

"197 degrees Fahrenheit - core burn out in 60 seconds."

"What happened to five minutes?" Lily said, distressed. Up above, one monkey was perched precariously and poking frantically at one of the large fan blades with a cotton swab. Lily couldn't be sure, be she thought it looked like Brian. With determined effort, he managed to turn the fan blade ever so slightly. At the last moment, he lost his balance and fell backwards into the open air. "Oh no! Briiiii!" Lily yelled. The monkey's safety harness cinched tight and stopped him in mid-air, saving him. Lily let out a big sigh of relief. Next to the elevator doors where Lily and the guard were waiting was a large electrical box marked 'High Voltage'. It was clearly locked. "We have to do something!" She cried, trying to break free from the guard. "Please, just open that panel!" She begged the guard.

"10...9...8..."

The guard looked at the panel, pulled out his flashlight from his belt, and hit the lock hard.

"7...6...5..."

The panel was dented, but the lock broke off! Lily opened the panel the rest of the way and recognized the same type of circuit breakers that were at her house.

"4...3...2..."

Quickly scanning the breakers, she flipped the only one that was tripped.

*"1...Prepare for core burn out...Goodbye!"*

All of sudden, there was a whirring sound and a rush of air as the fan roared to life.

*"Cooling fan activated. Core operating normally, initiating turbo fan mode."*

All the monkeys began hooting and jumping up and down hysterically. Lily was reminded of the monkeys at the Philadelphia Zoo; of course minus all the poop.

The fan began spinning faster and faster, and yet impossibly faster still!. The sheer volume of hot air was breathtaking. Slowly, but steadily, the heat sink cooled down. The lightning above faded into nothingness and the fan finally began to slow. The guard looked back and forth between Lily and the fan and shook his head in disbelief.



Turning away, the guard covered his ear piece and said, "Yes sir. Yes sir, I'm sure of it. It was the little girl, sir. I saw it with my own eyes, sir. Yes sir, standing by."

Brian made his way down the the heat sink and threaded his way to Lily who was jumping up and down happily. All round, cotton-like tumbleweeds were blowing around wildly as the remaining monkeys tried to gather them fumbling over them in their haste. "We did it it!" Brian said, with a huge smile on his face, hugging Lily. "No," interrupted the guard, " *she*" did it." He let a small grin appear on his face, but only for a moment.

Brian pulled back from Lily and held her by her shoulders at arm's length. Confused, Brian tilted his head and raised an eyebrow questioningly. The guard placed his hand back on his ear piece, glanced at Lily, then nodded. He turned to Lily and said, "Ma'am, I'm gonna have to ask you to follow me, King's ord. .." just then a cotton tumble weed hit the guard in the face. "Pah!" The guard said, wiping his face with his hand and pulling fuzz from his mouth. "Let's get out of here."

Brian, Lily and the guard go into the elevator that was waiting. The guard took a key from around his neck, inserted it into the key slot on the elevator's control panel and turned it to the right. A green light turned on and the guard pushed it. The elevator doors closed and Lily could feel that she was going down. Lily looked up and watched the numbers count down on the elevator's floor display, 4...3...2..., but noticed that they weren't slowing down. Instead, when the display read '1', it flashed and a polite female voice said, "Palace lower level access granted." Lily saw the guard resume his statuesque posture once more. It seemed to take a minute or two before the elevator slowed down then stopped. The doors opened...

## Chapter 7

Lily could see a cathedral style hallway lined with hundreds of doors, small and large on both sides. Chandeliers hung from the ceiling casting an eerie glow about. The floor appeared to be a black-gray and white marble. It was incredible! "Please, follow me", the guard said politely this time, not in his usual gruff voice. They all stepped off the elevator with the guard leading the way. Lily looked all about her as they walked. She noticed that some of the doors they passed had smaller doors in them and the marble floor had a mirror-like finish to it that echoed loudly with every footstep. Brian's head whipped about every which way and he whispered, "I wonder where we're going?"

"Shh", the guard said, turning around and stopping. "No talking! Don't make me angry! You won't like me when I'm angry.." The guard then turned and continued to walk.

"So much for being polite...", Lily whispered to Brian. The guard looked at Lily and she said meekly, "sorry".

They passed through a complicated maze of hallways turning left and right. Lily thought for sure that they were just going in circles. Apparently, this Palace was more of a labyrinth than a Palace. After walking what seemed to be an eternity, they passed under a large golden archway that led to an enormous room whose ceiling was higher than the one in the hallway. Centered on the floor was a large metallic crest that had the words, "Intel Core i7-6700." In a smaller script, around the edge, the word "Skylake" was barely visible.

Mounted on the far wall was a colossal computer monitor that rapidly scrolled text and numbers. There was a large, pearly-white desk that spanned the entire length of the wall below the monitor. Behind the desk stood four men who all had blue skin and who were

clearly dressed in royal attire. They had their backs to Lily, Brian and the guard as they approached. Their attention clearly rapt on the monitor full of moving text. Then the blue men turned as one and slowly faced the group. Meeting them stare-for-stare, Lily held her head high. Brian, who was nervously hiding behind Lily, grabbed his tail and began to needlessly fuss with it.

The guard escorted them to the center of the room, bowed to the four men, turned to the right, and then walked to the side of the room and stood at attention. Each of the four men spoke in turn, one word at a time with a brief pause in between before the next one spoke:

"Welcome...", said the first man furthest to the left in a shrill voice.

"To...", said the second on the far right with a deep bass sound.

"The...", said the third man next to the first in a melodious tone.

"Pentium...", said the fourth man, rather giggly.

"Palace", spoke the first man again.

"You are not of this world child. State your name", the four men spoke in turn in that silly manner they had.

Lily felt her head spin as she tried to keep up with which blue man was speaking.

"My name is Lily Shea and my friend here is Brian", she said sweetly.

"State your function Lily Shea."

"My function? I don't have a function. I'm just trying to get home."

"Home is where the heart is Lily Shea and, yes, you do have a function. Earlier you helped save our world from an unfortunate end. You have our gratitude, Lily Shea. As a token of our appreciation, is there anything we can do for you?"

"Yes! I need to find a way to get home."

"The only way we know is to ask the almighty administrator 'Lillian Shea' to intercede on your behalf."

Lily's eyes opened wide, "Wait a minute! That's my computer login name!"

The four blue men roared in one accord, "Silence!" Then the third man picked up where they left off and they started talking in that weird way again, "It is punishable by death to claim to be the almighty!"

"But it's true," pleaded Lily, "and I can prove it, My password is 'b-u-t-t-e-r-f-l-y'."

Collectively, their eyes closed and glowed a bright neon blue. After a few seconds, the glow disappeared and they opened their eyes.

<EOF>

\* \* \*

"A Father's love for his daughter demanded that there be an ending to this story. Indeed, there are two more whole stories available to read. In fact the next story is about anti-virus software and the one after that is software piracy. The most important part of this story though is for a daughter to learn that *A DADDY NEVER FORGETS....*"

-Johnathan Dires